



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
MARVIN WACHMAN FUND FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

**CLASSROOM LESSONS:
U.S. MILITARY HISTORY**

Regulars and Volunteers

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Key Question: What motivates people to join the army? Is it necessary to have a regular (permanent) army?

Relevance to Student Knowledge: Most students have done volunteer work, either by choice or because they are required to.

Student Learning Objectives: Students will learn why people join the Army and discuss differences between a volunteer (all-citizen) militia and a professional army.

TEKS

Social Studies: History :7.4(A,B) Issues during the Mexican War

Social Studies: Citizenship: 7.17 Importance of expression of different points-of-view in democratic society

Social Studies Skills: 7.21(C) Use critical thinking skills to support a point-of-view on a social studies issue

Language Arts: Speaking: 7.5(F) Clarify and support spoken ideas with evidence

Materials Included

§ Teacher historical background information;

see <http://www.nps.gov/paal/historyculture/index.htm>

see http://www.pbs.org/era/usmexicanwar/timeline_flash.html

Teacher-Supplied Materials

- Copies of student worksheets **Regular Soldiers and Volunteer Soldiers**, attached.

BACKGROUND

Popular Views on the Standing Army Before the U.S.-Mexican War:

U.S. Viewpoint

At the time of the U.S.-Mexican War, U.S. citizens mistrusted a standing army. Memories of giving up their homes and serving soldiers under the **British Quartering Acts** still lingered, and episodes like the **Newburgh Conspiracy** made citizens leery of military officers. Most citizens believed in republicanism – that the best possible army consisted of native-born citizens who would rise up and fight for their country. The public felt the best soldiers were everyday citizens who would, in times of war, take up arms for their country as their civic and patriotic duty.

Republicanism was supported by James K. Polk (U.S. President 1845-49), who declared in his 1845 State of the Union address:

Standing armies . . . are contrary to the genius of our free institutions, would impose heavy burdens on the people and be dangerous to public liberty. Our reliance for protection and defense on the land must be mainly on our citizen soldiers, who will be ever ready, as they ever have been ready in times past, to rush with alacrity, at the call of their country, to her defense.

Polk's statement may have been political, as the two generals – Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott – were Whigs, the opposing political party. Polk longed for a Democratic general, one whose victory on the battlefield would lead to a Democratic victory in the White House.

Before the U.S.-Mexican War: Mexican Viewpoint

Mexican citizens also mistrusted the standing army. The *fuero militar* – laws protecting soldiers from civil prosecution – fueled civilian fears. Furthermore, the standing army was unable to guard Mexico's borders. At a time when foreign threats, such as the rapidly expanding United States, lurked in the border regions, the army could not be trusted to provide adequate protection and defense.

Finally, the Mexican War of Independence (1810-21) from Spain resulted in political instability. After the War, several dictators who were present or former military officers used their military power to gain political control. At the beginning of the U.S.-Mexican War, Mexico was under such a dictatorship. In 1845, Mariano Paredes, a former brigadier general and secretary of war, overthrew then President Herrera, a former General, and installed himself as the new interim president. However, the Mexican congress had the power to pass resolutions, thus preventing the president from becoming an absolute dictator.

During the War: U.S. Army



source: <http://www.dean.usma.edu>

The first battles of the U.S.-Mexican War, fought on the fields of Palo Alto and at Resaca de la Palma, were fought by regular or professional soldiers in the standing army. These victories on the Rio Grande elevated the status of the standing army and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

The standing army was not large enough to continue the war in Mexico, and a call for volunteers was issued a week after the Battle of Palo Alto. The request was for 50,000 volunteers to serve for twelve months or the duration of the war. Recruitment by state authorities was just getting under way when news of the victories on the Rio Grande made newspaper headlines.

The reasons for volunteering for the state militia were many. Immigrants often joined the regular army to learn the language and customs and to be accepted in their adopted country. People joined to escape debt or domestic problems. Some sought adventures in a

foreign land. Others joined to impress women or be a hometown hero.

During the War: Mexican Army

As the Mexican standing army was unable to defend Mexico against foreign invasion, civic militias were called to fight against the North American invasion. The Battles of Palo Alto and at Resaca de la Palma were fought by regular soldiers and militia units fighting side-by-side. In contrast to the U.S. volunteers, the Mexican Army consisted mainly of conscripts. Men were ordered to leave their families and join the army.

Volunteers vs. Regulars

In the U.S. army, tensions quickly rose as citizen soldiers arrived to fight alongside the regular troops. Regulars saw volunteers as wasteful, useless, unprepared, and untrustworthy. According to General Winfield Scott,

Regulars, in 15 minutes, . . . will have tents pitched, arms & ammunition well secured; fires made, kettles boiling [for] wholesome cooking; all men dried, & at their supper, merry as crickets, before the end of the first hour. . . . Volunteers eat their meat raw; lose or waste their clothing; lie down wet; leave arms & ammunition exposed to rain . . . In a short time the [volunteer] ranks are thinned [and] the hospitals filled with the sick!

On the other hand, volunteer soldiers thought that regulars merely followed orders and were unable to for themselves. As Major Luther Gidding, 2nd Ohio Infantry, stated "[a volunteer] is not and never intends to be a mere moving and musket-holding machine."

Enlisted Men vs. Officers

A tense separation between enlisted soldiers and officers existed in both the U.S. and Mexican armies. Officers were often aristocrats who joined the army for political and financial reasons. Many officers were accused of fraud and of wasting military resources.

U.S. Army After the War

Shortly after the beginning of the War, Polk supported legislation calling for an increase in the standing army. The Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma helped increase the status of and respect for the professional army and West Point. However, the citizen soldier, the patriot who worked in the fields and took up arms to defend his country, was still a popular image with the American public.

The Conscription Act of 1863 was the first formal draft in the United States. Drafts have also been issued during World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Conscription formally ended in 1973 and since then the United States has relied on an all-volunteer force. However, unlike 19th century volunteers, this volunteer army is well-trained and prepared for combat situations.

Mexican Army After the War

After the War ended, President Herrera instituted military reforms to improve the standing army. These reforms improved military training, reduced wasteful spending, increase efficiency, and attempted to improve relations between officers and privates. However, the army remained scattered in small, regional units and was still subject to regional political pressures.

LESSON

Introduction

1. Ask students: Have you ever done volunteer work? Why did you do it?

Guided Lesson

1. Tell students: Today we're going to discuss the difference between a volunteer militia or all-citizen army and a regular or permanent army.
2. Ask students the following questions:
 - o Why do people join the army?
 - o Would you volunteer to join the army? Why or why not?
3. If not on the list, add and discuss the following reasons (reasons marked with an * are more applicable to volunteer regiments):

- § Immigrants had no choice
- § Immigrants can learn language and customs and be accepted because they are willing to die for their adopted country to because they have no choice
- § Free transportation to frontier*
- § Adventure in a foreign land*
- § Avenge those killed in the Texas Revolution
- § escape debt*
- § escape domestic problems*
- § personal glory
- § loyalty to one's state*
- § gain respect from local community (be a local hero)*
- § impress women

4. Ask students: What is a draft? Give them the following definition: A draft is requiring people to do military service. The formal word for a draft is conscription, which is a law that orders men into military service. People who are conscripted for the army are known as conscripts.
5. Tell students: Some believe a volunteer militia (group of citizens who are not part of the regular army with some military training who are called to active duty in an emergency) can protect the country better than a standing or permanent army. Take a vote on which students think is better. Record results on the board.

MANAGEMENT

1. Preview the lesson.
2. Photocopy the student worksheets.

Vocabulary:

Draft: Requiring people to do military service. The formal word for a draft is conscription.

Citizen Army: An army made up of citizens who volunteer in times of war

Conscription: A law that orders men into military service.

Conscript: A person who is conscripted for the army.

Regular Army: A permanent army of a country with professionally trained soldiers

Militia: Group of citizens (not part of the regular army) with some military training who are called to active duty only in an emergency

Dividing the Class

| # Students | Volunteer Soldiers | Regular Soldiers |
|------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 25 | 18 | 7 |
| 26 | 18 | 8 |
| 27 | 19 | 8 |
| 28 | 20 | 8 |
| 29 | 21 | 8 |
| 30 | 22 | 8 |
| 31 | 23 | 8 |
| 32 | 23 | 9 |
| 33 | 24 | 9 |
| 34 | 24 | 10 |
| 35 | 25 | 10 |

Discovery

1. Use the **Dividing the Class** chart to divide students into two different corners of the room.
2. Tell the class that they are all U.S. soldiers during the U.S.-Mexican War. The smaller group represents the regular or permanent army and the bigger group represents the volunteer army.
3. Use the **Deaths of Volunteers** chart to further divide each group into two other areas of the room.
4. Tell the larger group of volunteers and the smaller group of regulars that they died during the War.
5. Use the **Combat Deaths** chart to further divide each group into two other areas.
6. Tell the smaller group of volunteers and the larger group of regulars they died due to combat wounds.
7. Ask students why they think that a higher percentage of regular soldiers died of

combat wounds while a higher percentage of volunteer soldiers died due to disease. Be sure to mention the following: Discipline, Ability to survive a soldier's life (e.g., moving around to different locations, constantly camping out, doing lots of manual labor), Hygiene.

8. Give each regular a **Regular Soldiers** worksheet and each volunteer a **Volunteer Soldiers** worksheet.
9. Have the two groups work together to complete the worksheets.
10. Tell each group to develop a persuasive argument for why their soldier (regular or volunteer) is best.
11. When students are ready, conduct a debate in a "courtroom" format. Allow each group enough time to present and to respond.

Wrap-up Activities

Tell students the Battle of Palo Alto was fought by regular soldiers. After the Battle, U.S. citizens were more accepting of the army and the military academy at West Point. The technology developed at West Point and the drills and duties learned by the officers and taught to their soldiers assisted in their success at Palo Alto. Have a class discussion on whether it would have been better to have the standing army or an all-volunteer militia fight in the Battle of Palo Alto.

Extensions

1. At the time of the U.S.-Mexican War, citizens mistrusted a standing army. President Polk stated that "standing armies . . . are contrary to the genius of our free institutions, would impose heavy burdens on the people and be dangerous to public liberty." Have students write essays about this statement.
2. Have students pretend to volunteer for the U.S.-Mexican War and write a letter explaining their reasons for volunteering.
3. The charts in this lesson are based on statistics in the essay "The Immigrant Soldier in the Regular Army During the Mexican War" by Dale R. Steinhauer, in *Papers of the Second Palo Alto Conference*, Harriet Denise Joseph, Anthony Knopp, and Douglas A. Murphy, eds. (U.S. DOI, 1997). Have students use the following statistics to calculate the percentages of regulars vs. volunteers in their family, school, city, or another group.

Overview of American Forces in the Mexican War

| | % of Army | Overall Deaths | Combat Death |
|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| Regulars | 27% | 32% | 60% |
| Volunteers | 73% | 66% | 40% |

Student Evaluation/Assessment: Observe each student for class participation.

Statistics Chart: Deaths of Volunteer Soldiers

| # Volunteer Soldiers | # of Deaths | # of Survivors |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 18 | 12 | 6 |
| 19 | 12 | 7 |
| 20 | 13 | 7 |
| 21 | 13 | 8 |
| 22 | 14 | 8 |
| 23 | 15 | 8 |
| 24 | 15 | 9 |
| 25 | 16 | 9 |

Statistics Chart: Deaths of Regular Soldiers

| # Dead Volunteer Soldiers | # Of Deaths Due to Battle Wounds | # Of Deaths Due to Disease |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 7 | 2 | 5 |
| 8 | 2 | 6 |
| 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 10 | 3 | 7 |

Statistics Chart: Combat Deaths of Volunteer Soldiers

| # Dead Volunteer Soldiers | # Of Deaths Due to Battle Wounds | # Of Deaths Due to Disease |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 12 | 4 | 8 |
| 13 | 5 | 8 |
| 14 | 5 | 9 |
| 15 | 6 | 9 |
| 16 | 6 | 10 |

Statistics Chart: Combat Deaths of Regular Soldiers

| # Dead Volunteer Soldiers | # Of Deaths Due to Battle Wounds | # Of Deaths Due to Disease |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 |

Regular Soldier

Name: _____

You are proud to be a regular soldier in the U.S. Army. You do daily drills (practice military skills and discipline) alongside your fellow soldiers and are prepared to fight and endure the hardships of a soldier's life. You know the regular army can protect the country better than a volunteer militia because:

Regulars can take care of themselves. "Regulars, in 15 minutes, . . . will have tents pitched, arms & ammunition well secured; fires made, kettles boiling [for] wholesome cooking; all men dried, & at their supper, merry as crickets, before the end of the first hour. . . . Volunteers eat their meat raw; lose or waste their clothing; lie down wet; leave arms & ammunition exposed to rain . . . In a short time the [volunteer] ranks are thinned [and] the hospitals filled with the sick!" – General Winfield Scott, Letter to the Secretary of War

Regulars understand the importance of drilling (practicing military skills and discipline) to survive battles and camp life. "Volunteers . . . cannot endure [army] fatigues (chores and work done by soldiers) . . . It is too difficult to keep them under proper discipline." – Captain Rogers, 2nd Mississippi Rifles

Regulars are always ready and prepared to fight. The first call for volunteers was seven days after the Battle of Palo Alto, the first battle of the U.S.-Mexican War. If it had not been for the regulars, there would have been no soldiers ready to fight in that battle.

Regulars can be trusted to treat everyone with respect. "Some of the volunteers . . . seem to think it perfectly right to impose upon the people of a conquered City to any extent. . . . And how much they seem to enjoy acts of violence too!" – 2nd Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant

In your own words, explain the ways in which the regular standing army can protect the country better than a volunteer militia.

Volunteer Soldier

Name: _____

You are a blacksmith. When your state calls for volunteers to fight in the U.S.-Mexican War, you rush to enlist. You are proud to be in a volunteer militia and believe that protecting your country is your duty as a good citizen. You know a volunteer militia can protect the country better than the regular army because:

Volunteers can take care of themselves. "Role calling and drill are good . . . but volunteers should be exempt [freed from] all duties except such as are absolutely necessary. They are composed of a different material from the regulars and should be differently managed." – Sergeant Thomas Barclay, 2nd Pennsylvania Infantry

Volunteers can think for themselves. "A Volunteer thinks and feels. . . . He is not and never intends to be a mere moving and musket-holding machine." – Major Luther Gidding, 2nd Ohio Infantry

Volunteers are always ready and prepared to fight. "Our reliance for protection and defense must be mainly on our citizen soldiers, who will be ever ready, as they have been ever ready in times past, to rush . . . to her [the country's] defense." – President James K. Polk

Volunteers can be trusted but regulars are a threat to a free, democratic society. "Standing armies . . . are dangerous to the liberties of a free people." – Continental Congress

In your own words, explain the ways in which a volunteer militia can better protect the country than the regular standing army.
